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Grace Evangelical Church
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"Blessing One Another"
Galatians 5:1, 13-16; Mark 10:43-45

I'm sure that we are all familiar with the name, Bernie Madoff.

Madoff, who once served as a non-executive chairman of the NASDAQ stock exchange, pled guilty to an 11-count criminal complaint, admitting to defrauding thousands of investors of billions of dollars.

He was convicted of operating a Ponzi scheme that has been called the largest investor fraud ever committed by a single person. Federal prosecutors estimated client losses, which included fabricated gains, of almost \$65 billion. On June 29, 2009, he was sentenced to 150 years in prison, the maximum allowed.

I understand that Madoff founded the Wall Street firm Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities LLC in 1960, and was its chairman until his arrest on December 11, 2008. The firm was one of the top market maker businesses on Wall Street, which bypassed "specialist" firms, by directly executing orders over the counter from retail brokers.

He confessed to his sons on December 10, 2008, that the asset management arm of his firm was a giant Ponzi scheme—as he put it, "one big lie." They then passed this information to authorities. The following day, Federal Bureau of Investigation agents arrested Madoff and charged him with one count of securities fraud. The SEC had previously conducted several investigations into Madoff's business practices since 1999, which critics contend were incompetently handled.

Why do I bring up Bernie Madoff today? For this reason.

Here is a man who thought he was free to do what he wanted – to defraud thousands of investors of billions of dollars. He evidently thought that he wouldn't get caught, or the more he defrauded his clients, the more he liked the money and what it did for him, so he just kept on misleading his clients.

He thought, evidently, that he was free to break the law, but all the time not realizing that a day of reckoning would come, and the law would point out that he was a man who was in bondage to his lusts for money, power, and possessions. He was so controlled by his own lusts that he would mislead his clients to become rich at their expense.

Bernie Madoff was not free at all. He was so in spiritual bondage to his old Adamic sin nature, that he deceived people into thinking he was blessing them, he was serving them, when in reality he was destroying their very livelihoods. The very law he evidently thought would not catch up with him did, for the law he broke was used to condemn him to a jail sentence of 150 years.

What Bernie Madoff needs is to experience the freedom in Christ that Paul wrote about to the Galatians many years ago, and is still for us today for Christ's kind of freedom is for all time and eternity for it is eternal freedom. Which means that first of all there is. . . .

I. The daily challenge before us (Galatians 5:1, 13).

Note Galatians 5:1,

"It was for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery – the yoke of bondage."

"For you were called to freedom, brethren" (Galatians 5:13).

What's the challenge before us? It has two sides to it.

1. There is the challenge for the unbeliever.

(1) His condition before God.

What's that? That the breaking of the law of God points out that a person, like Bernie Madoff, stands condemned by the very law he thinks he can ignore and get away with. His actions point out that he has a spiritual problem, he is a sinner in need of a Savior. He is in eternal spiritual bondage or slavery. How so?

Go back with me to Galatians 3:19, where Paul asks, "What, then, was the purpose of the law?" He answers this question in Galatians 3:24, "So the law has become our tutor (put in charge) to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith."

That is true because the law can't save or provide righteousness (Galatians 3:21). That's why Paul tells us in Romans 3:20 that no one will be justified, or declared righteous by observing the law; rather through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

Thusly, everyone stands condemned before God because all of us have broken God's law because we are all related to the Adam who got us all in deep spiritual trouble. Paul in Romans 3:7 puts it this way that "There is none righteous not even one."

Bernie Madoffs actions show, then, that he is in need of the Savior. The very law that he broke condemns him. It is true for all of us, regardless of what we have done that is wrong. James says that if we break the law in one point, like showing partiality, we are guilty of breaking the whole law.

Is there a solution to standing before God condemned by the very law we have broken.

(2) God's solution for the unbeliever.

So what does God do to deal with man in his condition of condemnation before Him. He loves the unbeliever so much that He sends His eternal Son to take upon Himself sinless humanity, the incarnation, the grand miracle.

Galatians 4:4 puts it this way. "When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." In his life in his ministry Christ fulfills every aspect of the law, the Ten Commandments, the Ordinances, and the worship system including the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the feasts, even the priesthood. In His death, Christ pays the penalty for our breaking God's law, which is death. He is buried and rises again on the third day.

Now what does the Scripture say? Romans 10:4 reads, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

What we could never do, fulfill the entire law of God, Christ did for us in His life, plus paying the penalty for our breaking God's law which is death. God's eternal redemption has been won for the believer in Christ. Now through faith in Christ, the believer can be declared righteous, justified, because the law of God has been fulfilled and the penalty for breaking God's law has been paid for.

It's the great act of redemption, the paying of the eternal price through giving His life blood so that Christ could buy us out of the slave market of sin and place us into His eternal kingdom.

This is what Galatians 4:5 tells us that Christ was born under the law, that He might redeem those who are under the law (emphatic word for redemption, stressing not just the payment for sin, the taking out of the slave market of sin, but one will never go back into the kingdom of darkness again).

As Paul goes on to say in Galatians 4:5, believers in Christ are adopted, placed into God's family with the title of sons of God, God is their heavenly Father, and they have direct access into His presence through prayer. Believers in Christ are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ (Galatians 4:7; Romans 8:15-17).

How great is that!. No wonder in the Book of Revelation chapter 5 those gathered around God's throne sing a new song.

of praise for the Lamb taking the 7 sealed book and able to open it.

What's the song?

It's a song of praise to the Lamb of God! For what are they praising the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ? Revelation 5:9 gives us the answer.

"You were slain, and have redeemed (some translations say, "purchased," but the word in the original text is "redeemed" for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth."

What excites those in heaven when the Lamb of God takes the 7-sealed book, actually the Book of Redemption?

Eternal redemption has been won by the Lamb who was slain and rose again from the dead. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has prevailed.

Christ's redemption is the root of everything else His redemption provides for the believer in Christ, we who know Christ as personal Savior - justification, sanctification, glorification, the indwelling Holy, the hope of some day being forever with our Lord in the heavenly home He is preparing for us.

Yes, we should sing with enthusiasm and joy, "Redeemed how I love to proclaim it. Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Redeemed through His infinite mercy, His child and forever I am."

Still, it's quite another matter to live out one's freedom in Christ.

That's what Paul talks about in our text.

II. The privilege and responsibility to live in the freedom of Jesus Christ. – His eternal redemption - (Galatians 5:1, 13-15).

1. The privilege of living in Christ's freedom (Gal. 5:1a).

Realize that as a believer in Jesus Christ you have the position of being free in Jesus Christ.

Note what Paul penned in Galatians 5:1a.

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free, therefore keep standing firm (Present imperative – let it be the moment by moment experience in your life of living in the freedom of Christ . . ."

Then, Galatians 5:13, "For you were called to freedom."

Paul is telling the Galatians and us to always remember your position of being free in Christ –

remember the penalty for sin has been paid, you are not under the law, you have been set free to serve the Lord, you are no longer a part of the kingdom of darkness, you, are in God's eternal kingdom as a son or daughter of the eternal and personal God, an heir of God and a joint heir of Jesus Christ. You are the Lord's whether you live or whether you die. Never forget your position in Christ. Regardless of what happens to you, or what you go through, remember you are free in Christ to do His will.

But with that position of privilege to have freedom in Christ, there is also the responsibility that comes with that position of privilege.

2. The responsibility of living in Christ's freedom (Gal. 5:1b, 13-15).

(1) The negative (Gal. 5:1b, 13b).

"Do not be subject again to a yoke of bondage."

"Only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh."

When Paul wrote the Galatian letter to the churches in north central Asia Minor or to church in South Galatia, there were those who some called Judaizers who were trying to get those who accepted Christ to still keep the law of Moses, to follow the different laws and precepts. They were trying to distort the gospel of Jesus Christ, the redemption that Christ had won for them.

They were being challenged to live by depending on themselves and the law to help them gain acceptance before God. They were mixing law and grace. That's why Paul says if you do that you have fallen from grace, that is you are using the the law as the ground for justification, yes, redemption, which is impossible.

Such mixing of the Law of God and His redemption in Christ, led to all kinds of squabbles and the breaking down of relationships that Christ had secured for them

In other words, the believers in the Galatian churches thought that they had to keep doing certain things that the law of Moses said in order to gain acceptance before God.

It's like people today who think that they have to be baptized, go to church, do good things, yes, keep the ten commandments plus believe in Jesus in order to gain salvation or redemption in Christ.

Then there are those who believe in Jesus Christ as personal Savior, experience His redemption, and then think somehow they have to serve the Lord in order to gain His approval.

Such thinking forgets that is really living under the Law which said, "if you do this, you will be blessed."

Or they try to serve the Lord in their own strength, which leads to all kinds of frustration and complaining. It results in comparing one's self with others, and soon there is jealousy and breakdown in relationships. That's why Paul says that they are using their position in Christ to further their selfish desires, and they are biting and devouring one another.

God's desire is that believers in Christ not live under the law of Moses, nor live in their own strength as they try to serve the Lord for that produces all kinds of frustration, breakdown in relationships, yes, sin, in individual lives, in families, and in a church family.

Thusly, God uses Paul to emphasize emphatically on the positive responsibility that redeemed people in Jesus have.

2. The positive (Gal 5:13b, 14).

"But through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (quoting from Leviticus 19:18).

God is telling us here that true freedom in Christ doesn't live under the law of Moses, that is bondage and distorting who Christ is and what He has done for us as believers in Christ. True freedom in Christ is not filled with living in one's own strength, living with a duty bound, complaining attitude.

Rather, through love, agape love, Calvary love, unconditional, and sacrificial love, Christ's love at work in an individual believer is what true freedom in Christ is all about, for it issues forth in serving one another. The word used for serving is *doulos* – or slave, and the word, serve, is a present imperative, a command, meaning one should through love keep serving one another at all times.

Notice how this all works for us in our daily lives in our relationships with one another.

(1) New Blessing – Freedom in Christ – Eternal position (Gal. 5:1, 13)

The believer is blessed by God – the eternal position of being accepted in Jesus Christ – the believer is redeemed by the precious blood of Christ – Free in Christ. One is not under a duty to live for Christ. One has been blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

(2) New Motivation (Gal. 5:13).

The believer is given the very love of Christ, in receiving the life of Christ, the new nature. Paul tells us that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5). So each believer possesses the love of Jesus Christ to love unconditionally, sacrificially, and selflessly. The love of Christ is not selfish, complaining, trying to intimidate, or trying to be better than someone else. That's why Paul told the Corinthians that the love of Christ constrains or controls (impels) him (I Corinthians 5:14).

Of course, the love of Christ is a holy love, that has standards that reaches out minister to people. Read I Corinthians 13.

However, the believer's new position and new motivation can't be done in one's own strength. This is what some of the Galatian believers were trying to do, as we have mentioned, thinking it could happen by keeping the law, or serving God in their own strength. Well it ended up in a mess in their personal lives, their family lives, and in their church life – their relationships were filled with bickering and jealousy, disharmony all over the place.

God tells them and us through Paul, that this is living by the flesh, the old Adamic nature. What is needed is for the believers to yield to the Holy Spirit who lives within them – the new empowerment.

(3) New Empowerment –(Gal. 5:16).

"Walk by the Spirit (continually walk, present imperative), and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." It's impossible to serve the Lord with the attitude of a slave without obeying the Holy Spirit who lives within him. The Spirit of God empowers the believer to love like Christ, with expecting anything in return, doing it sacrificially, without complaining and murmuring.

(4) New Attitude (Gal. 5:13).

Be continually serving one another. The word for serving in our text in Galatians 5:13 interestingly is "doulos." Christ set the ultimate example in serving as described in Mark 10:43-45.

"But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant (diaconos). And whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave (doulos) of all. For even the Son of man came not to be served (diaconos), but to serve (diaconos), and to give His life a ransom for many.

Immediately, it becomes obvious that there are two words for serving here. One is "doulos" meaning slave, and the other is "Diaconos," from which the word, deacon comes, which refers to all kinds of things that a person does.

It appears here that the word, doulos, is referring more to one's attitude in serving, an attitude of submission to the Lord while serving others. The word, diaconos, is referring more to the activity or the various words one speaks, and the actions that one carries out in ministering to one another.

Certainly Jesus exhibited the ultimate attitude of slavery as He submitted to the Father's will in carrying out our redemption. He set the pace for all of us. Then Christ exhibited ultimately a life of service, the life of a servant, in all that he did from the smallest to the largest.

Paul, then, seems to saying here, that when the believer lives his life in the freedom of Christ, his life in serving should show an attitude of submission to the Lord as he serves, reaches out to minister to others. This attitude of submission will keep the believer loving like Christ, unconditionally, sacrificially, and selflessly in the power of the Holy Spirit. It can be done spontaneously, and strategically, that is with planning.

Involved in serving the Lord, then.

New Attitude – submission to one's heavenly Father.

Out of that attitude of submission to the Father comes the various activities that the believer carries out in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(5) New Activity (Gal. 5:13)

Do all tasks, large or small, in the Spirit's power to the glory of God.

That's why Paul tells the Colossians, that we do our tasks for the Lord not men. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. Yes, whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.

When I don't submit to the Father as I serve others, I will float back into what Paul is telling the Galatians and us that we shouldn't do – operate from our selfishness which leads to all kinds of problems in our relationships, as one tries to live under the law.

What's the result or outcome of submitting to the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit serving one another in love as Christ did?

6. New Outcome (Gal. 5:14).

Two things happen when the believer in the power of the Holy Spirit serves one another in love.

(1) The law is fulfilled.

"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Well, I thought, we are not under the law of Moses – we have freedom in Christ. We do. But loving like Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, submitting our lives to our Heavenly Father means that the very law of God is being fulfilled in and through us, because Calvary love flowing through the believer to others is the fulfilling of the law of God.

Take the ten commandments. The first five are directed toward God, and the second five are directed toward humanity, toward others.

Jesus taught that there are two great commandments (Matthew 22:37-39).

(1) You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

(2) You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Then the Lord said, "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and prophets."

Why so? The first great commandment fulfills the first five commands of the ten commandments, and the second great commandment fulfills the last five of the ten commandments.

But something else happens.

(2) Individual lives are touched with the love of Jesus Christ.

That is what happens when we serve one another.

****By our words (Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6).**

Do we speak words of encouragement that build up, that cause a person to realize how valuable he or she is. Do we praise our children, our grand children. Do we give them a hug.

Take Roger, who eventually died on the way to school one day. It was discovered that even though he had done well at school, things began to go south at home. There was a breakup in the family, but Roger never received the attention he should have received. Roger's school work began to suffer. He withdrew from the other children. He soon retreated into his world of silence. Everything and everyone of value to Roger had been lost and taken away. There were no words of encouragement. No genuine love. He felt like an empty zero. He died in the snow after he got off of the school bus. Further investigation revealed no physical reason that he should have died.

Evidently, he died of a broken heart from feeling valueless without any love.

Take the family whose motto on the wall that belonged to Cheryl's grandfather read, "Don't take anything off anyone. Stand up and fight." It may have been a good motto for the frontier but it did nothing but damage the relationship between Cheryl and her father. He had been infected with the idea, "Never give an inch." "I'm sorry," or "You're right" or "I love you," or "Will you forgive me?" were words not in his vocabulary. Cheryl's mother and father fought constantly. As Cheryl's four brothers and sisters grew they also joined in the battle to "stand up and fight – meaning "Fight for my rights."

Cheryl went away to a Young Life Camp one summer and found that the Lord was seeking her and accepted Him as her personal Savior. The first thing she noticed on the wall when she came home were those words on the plaque, "Stand up."

She thought about how Christ had laid down His life for her and her family and she realized how tired she was of following the family rule. In the midst of a fight in her family she would say, "I am sorry, you're right. Would you forgive me?" and end the argument. She even began saying, "I love you, Mom. Love you Dad, and then give them a big hug. As she left for school.

Through Christ loving through Cherrly, as she served her family, with loving words, and commitment no matter what the cost, her younger sister accepted Christ. Then her older brother accepted Christ. The plaque on the wall was beginning to shake. At Christmas time, her father who had accepted Christ, took down the family plaque. Now they were free to speak up and encourage one another.

****By our deeds, regardless of size.**

It's not just by speaking words of grace, blessing, and encouragement, we can serve one another, it is of course by our actions as we serve one another individually, in our families, in our church family, even at work.

I remember Bruce Larson telling of when his family went on vacation without him. He decided later that he would go meet them. He discovered about where they would be at a certain time, and when they came along he was standing by the road waiting for them. He communicated to them, how valuable they were and that he wanted to be with them. I have memories of my dad getting up in the middle of the night to come and check in on me when I wasn't feeling good.

One man at work noticed that something seemed wrong with his boss, and he thought he needed a friend. One day decided to ask him how he was doing, and that opened up an opportunity to eventually get together with the man on a continual basis to help him work through some family issues. Through blessing his boss, he noticed that his boss begin to soften a little in his strict rule of professional distance.

Then, it may mean praying for someone, or calling on someone who has a need you are aware of. **One's neighbor is whoever God has placed in your way to minister to.** It can even mean reaching out to those in your neighborhood, or becoming involved in the Tour of Madison, or cleaning the church, ushering or greeting on Sunday morning.

Serving one another can take on all kinds of activities, yes serving those in some way who need the Lord, letting them know that the Lord loves them without first telling them about Christ.

Steve Sjogern tells about the time a group was doing a free car wash in New York City . He said that people are either like porcupines, either turn their soft vulnerable side, or their prickly skeptical side that says, "I don't want to hear anything about this Jesus you are talking about." This free car wash caused one porcupine to turn his soft side to them, a man who worked in the sanitation department. When he drove into their car wash he was angry and disgusted because the traffic had been slowed down on his route. The emotionally charged encountered changed immediately when the car washers offered to wash his entire garbage truck free. Before he could say no, they were eagerly washing his truck. This man stood in stunned silence just shaking his head. A couple of girls standing by explained to him that they just wanted to show him God's love in a practical way. The driver of the garbage truck muttered, "When I get back to the garage I just know the other guys aren't gonna believe that this happened." A few minutes later he asked for prayer of a number of issues in his life—right in the middle of the Big Apples' hustle and hurry.

Blessing, yes, serving one another whether individually, in one's family, in the church family, or out side of the church family has a life-changing effect on people. We need to take time to touch people with Christ's love in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps these two poems summarize what it means to serve in the redemption of Christ, His freedom, as we serve one another in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Father, where shall I work today?
And my love flowed warm and free.
Then He pointed out a tiny spot,
And said, "Tend that for Me."
I answered quickly, "Oh no not that.
Why, no one would ever see.
No matter how well my work was done,
Not that little place for me!"
And the word He spoke, it was not stern,
He answered tenderly,
"Ah little one, search that heart of thine;**

**Are you working for them or me?
Nazareth was a little place,
And so was Galilee.**

**Yes, success is speaking words of praise,
In cheering other people's ways,
In doing just the best you can
With every task and every plan.**

**It's silence when your speech would hurt,
Politeness when your neighbor's curt,
It's deafness when the scandal flows,
And sympathy with other's woes.**

**It's loyalty when duty calls,
It's courage when disaster falls,
It's patience when the hours are long.
It's found in laughter and in song.**

**It's in the silent time of prayer,
In happiness and in despair,
In all of life and nothing less,
We find the thing we call success.**

"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"